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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 006213

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KING URGES GOVERNMENT TO PULL UP ITS SOCKS

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) King Abdullah wrote a critical letter to Prime Minister Faisal Fayez on July 20 prodding the government to take action on the priorities that the King laid out at the formation of the government in October 2003. Debate ranges on whether the tone of the letter indicates a reaffirmation of support for the government or a warning that changes may be at hand. The King clearly states in the letter that the efforts of the government should "improve the living standards of citizens." Royal Court Minister Rifai described the letter to Charge as a "wake-up call" to the cabinet - and a list of unaccomplished goals that had been bothering the King. End Summary.

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Jolt of Energy, Focus on Education  
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2. (C) Royal Court Minister Samir Rifai told the Charge July 22 that the purpose of the King's letter was to issue a wake-up call to a drifting cabinet. By listing the aims which the King had identified when he appointed the government, but which had not been achieved, the King wanted to prod action. This development comes against the backdrop of intense infighting, backbiting, and competition among senior regime figures, principally Rifai himself, GID Chief Saad Kheir, and PM Fayez - in particular, Rifai said, the King was concerned with Islamist influence in the education system, a concern that was partially behind the letter. Rifai said the King has pressed Education Minister Touqan to "clean out" the ministry and schools, replacing Islamists appointed in the early 90s under an Islamist minister with progressives. Press reports indicate that Touqan this week replaced the two secretaries general in the ministry, and discussions in the ministry indicate that he intends to tackle office directors in the near future. More broadly, Rifai said the King also wants to "re-direct" university studies into more productive areas focused on the job market. He claimed that out of 180,000 university students in Jordan, "only 1,000" are working on "practical studies," with 20,000 in Islamic studies. The rest are studying less useful subjects. The King's letter calls on the government to realign studies to meet the needs of the market. Particularly, he calls for a focus on technology, "because technology has become the decisive factor in measuring peoples' progress and prosperity."

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Moderate Islamic Teachings  
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3. (SBU) The King's letter calls on the country's Muslim clerics to take a greater role in promoting and appreciating the true values and principles of Islam. In particular he called on them to reinforce the ideas of tolerance, moderation and interaction while eliminating provocative and divisive rhetoric. Christian leaders expressed their support for the King's remarks to PolCouns July 21. They viewed the letter as a call to increase dialogue and interaction with their Muslim counterparts. They felt that the King hoped to counter the teachings of Islamic extremists by calling moderate Imams to action.

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Members of Parliament Debate Meaning  
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4. (U) Debate in Parliament on July 21 focused on the intent of the letter. Many members of Parliament expressed their wide ranging views in the local press. Some took the letter as a clear reaffirmation of support of the government in order to quell rumors that changes were on the way. Other members felt that the letter served as a final notice that the government must show some progress in the areas of human development, education, health care, tourism and agriculture. Still others felt the meaning of the letter was blurred as it both criticized and supported the government.

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Cabinet Prepares Response  
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15. (U) Following local political tradition, Fayeze has reportedly met with the Cabinet July 22 to draft a response to the King's letter. The response is expected to highlight accomplishments of the past eight months and provide a statement of future action based on the original letter of designation written by the King to Fayeze when the new government was formed in October 2003. The response will reportedly be delivered to the King on July 23.

HALE